

Maine Legislature

Senate Democratic Office

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DEMOCRATIC RADIO ADDRESS

Sen. Johnson says food hubs will connect the dots of our growing food economy

Any vision to create [A Better State of Maine](#) must include support for our increasingly important food industry. That means investing in creative new ways to help our farmers, fishermen and food producers grow and get their products to market.

Hi, this is State Senator Chris Johnson from Somerville. Thanks for tuning in.

Here in Maine, our natural resources and quality of place are our advantages, the foundation for our economy. That includes the food grown on our farms, the harvest from our seas, and the renowned foods and beverages produced here in our state.

From the farm and the sea right to the plate, this is a growth industry in our state, and one that's a growing part of Maine's national and international brand. And farming is attracting young people, with the average age of a farmer in Maine going down.

These are advantages to leverage. But there are constraints on the industry that make growth difficult.

For example, Maine's food industry is comprised of many thousands of small operations — family-owned farms, food startups and independent fishermen. In that small-scale economy, it can be hard to do the things you need to do to grow. Purchasing, processing, marketing and distribution can all be difficult for small businesses like these.

I wouldn't trade our small and independent businesses for anything. But we can make them even stronger, create even more jobs, and help young families succeed, by connecting the dots.

Food Hubs are one solution. These are places where our farmers, fishermen and food producers can collaborate to achieve scale. By combining forces, they can purchase equipment, help each other get their goods to market, and do anything else to add value that they may have had a hard time doing alone.

Last year's New England Food Vision Report indicated that New England could increase its food production by five times, until it was producing half of the food consumed in the region. Maine has a critical role to play in seizing this regional food production opportunity, given our massive size, the availability of fertile land and our typically abundant water supply.

During the past two legislatures, I've sponsored legislation to create food hubs and restore farmland. Bipartisan coalitions have supported these bills in recognition that they would give a hand-up to the men and women in this important sector of our economy. Particularly small operations like Sheepscot General, Fuzzy Udder Creamery and Morning Dew Farm, right here in my district.

Unfortunately, these commonsense bills — supported by farms, food producers and food policy experts — were rejected by Republicans in the Legislature, and by the governor.

But we can't give up now. A new study by Harvard University outlined the immense potential for growth in Maine's food sector. The only thing holding us back is a vision for how to bring all the pieces together, to enable farmers young and old to succeed. Helping our small businesses expand is part of that, so I'll keep fighting to give our farmers, fishermen and food producers the tools they need to grow and prosper.

I'm Senator Chris Johnson. Thanks for listening.

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